

## Overseas bidders want a Docklands Light Railway ticket



The profile of the Docklands Light Railway was raised by its successful use during the Olympic Games last summer London News Pictures/Rex

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Two foreign-owned rail construction companies are among the frontrunners to take over the operation of Docklands Light Railway in East London.

The arrival of Colas Rail and Amey as bidders for the DLR has sparked industry speculation that such infrastructure companies might become increasingly interested in franchises on the national rail network.

Colas Rail has been shortlisted in a 50-50 joint venture with Go-Ahead Group to run the £430 million contract for the driverless train network linking the capital's two business districts of the City and Canary Wharf.

Colas is the railway unit of Bouygues, the French construction group. It has not worked previously with Go-Ahead, the train operator that runs the Southeastern, Southern and London Midland rail franchises in a joint venture with another French company Keolis, a subsidiary of SNCF, the state-owned railway.

Significantly, Keolis has also made the shortlist for the DLR, teaming up 70-30 with Amey, which is owned by Ferrovial, the Spanish group best known for being a big shareholder in Heathrow.

The other shortlisted bidders are the incumbent Serco, which has run the DLR since 1997 and also runs the Mayor of London's "Boris Bike" hire scheme; and Stagecoach, the South West Trains and East Midlands Trains operator and co-owner of Virgin Trains. Stagecoach also runs buses on the DLR's manor in East London.

The emergence for the first time of Colas and Amey in a British train franchise competition is down to the particular nature of the DLR contracts. The winning franchise operator is expected not only to operate the trains but also maintain the tracks and the stations — a model that some argue should be introduced to parts of the national railway network.

A spokesman for Go-Ahead said: "We decided to join forces with an infrastructure partner because of the nature of the contract. Go-Ahead decided to team with Colas because of its existing experience on the DLR network maintaining the City Airport, Woolwich Arsenal and Stratford International extensions. Go-Ahead also wanted to bid for the franchise because of its experience running high-density commuter networks, predominantly in London and the South East."

Amey is one of Network Rail's biggest contractors and was also the main contractor introducing surveillance and public address systems on the London Overground network.

The new franchise, which is in the gift of Transport for London, is due to be operational from September 2014. The new licensee

will be named next year.

There have long been arguments for an ambitious expansion of the DLR with direct connections under London to St Pancras and Victoria mainline stations. Boris Johnson, the Mayor of London, has promised an extension to the borders of Kent at Bromley.

The DLR carried 100 million passengers last year, for the first time, helped by increased patronage during the Olympic Games. It has 24 miles of track, with 149 carriages serving 45 stations.

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